

May 4, 2008

Title: Embrace Eternity

Text: Luke 12:13-21

Thesis: Today is a good day to look beyond and ask, "Then what?"

Series Introduction;

Tim McGraw's hit song *Live Like You Were Dying*, is the springboard for the current series of messages. The song is the story of a man who learned he was dying of a fatal disease and what he learned about living his final days well. It is a song about what he found to be important and how he hoped everyone could have the chance to live like they only had thirty days to live.

The series is based on the materials provided for the *Live Like You Were Dying Church Campaign Resource Kit* available from WWW.LLYWD.ORG. In addition to the suggested sermon titles and general outlines, I have attempted to cite any other specific references lifted from the resources.

Message Introduction:

Embrace Eternity Clip - People on the Street Interview Clip

The clip certainly raises some questions in our minds. I am reminded of my 1970's vintage Evangelism Explosion training. We were taught that when engaged in a spiritual conversation about someone's eternal destiny, we asked two very pertinent and thought provoking questions. These are the questions:

1. Have you come to the point in your spiritual life where you know that if you were to die today you would go to heaven or is that something you are still working on?
2. Suppose you were to die today and stand before God and God were to ask you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" what would you say?

The questions assume the existence of God, heaven, the alternative to heaven, and an afterlife. And if we believe the bible is the inspired Word of God and is useful to teach us what is true and make us realize what is wrong in our lives; that it straightens us out and teaches us what is right (II Timothy 3:16 NLT), then despite all the questions raised in the minds of the people interviewed on the street and in our own minds, we may know the truth.

I John 5 specifically states, "This is what God has said: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son, Jesus Christ. So whoever has God's Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write this to you so that you who believe in the Son of God, may know that you have eternal life." I John 5:11-13

Many people feel like an Olympic Skier. We have watched the jumpers racing down the slope in a tuck position and then catapult off the end of the jump. They lean forward into the jump extending their bodies out over their skis as long as possible. As long as possible, they lean into the jump...

We are all doing just that. We are leaning into life. We are fully extended. Air-born. And just like the skier, we are eventually going to come down. We are going to complete our jumps and cross the finish line.

That fact is what raises this question: Then what?

When live like we were dying we live in such a way that we can embrace eternity with some assurance about the “then what” question. Perhaps we can sort out the “then what” as we examine a story from the life and teaching of Jesus Christ in Luke 12.

Then someone called from the crowd, “Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father’s estate with me.” Jesus replied, “Friend, who made me judge over you to divide such things as that?” Then he said, “Beware! Don’t be greedy for what you don’t have. Real life is not measured by how much we own.” And he gave an illustration: A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. In fact, his barns were full to overflowing.

**So he said, ‘I know! I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll have enough room for everything. And I’ll sit back and say to myself, My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get it all?’ “Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.” Luke 12:13-21
NLT**

We’re not talking Warren Buffett or Bill Gates rich... and we are not saying that the rich are necessarily spiritually destitute. Jesus told a story about a man who lived the American dream. He worked hard, saved his money, and retired figuring he could live very well for a long, long time. He thought, I’m going to take it easy. I’m going to eat, drink and be full as a tick on a bloodhound and happy as a pig in slop. But that wasn’t his problem... his problem is that he did not consider the “then what” question. He was solely concerned about this life and gave no thought to the next.

That was his first mistake...

1. He lived like this life is all there is.

It is a fatal miscalculation to live like this life is all there is. This is a fatal miscalculation!

Many of the miscalculations of life are of little consequence. We try to go one more mile when our gas gage reads Empty. We plan a reception for 200 guests and only 160 guests attend. We assume that if we get the Mother's Day card in the mail by May 9th that it will arrive before the 11th. We put our tomato plants out early thinking, if we cover them the frost won't get them. These are all innocuous miscalculations. But some miscalculations are fatal.

On May 18, 1980, Mt. St. Helens erupted. Many of us have vivid memories of the scenes of devastation. Harry Truman was the name of the man who refused to leave his home and business on Spirit Lake, at the foot of the mountain. In an article titled, Crotchety Harry Truman Remains an Icon of the Eruption the reporter wrote, "He felt like everyone else, that he would be able to see the lava start to ooze down and a news helicopter would come in and scoop him up at the last minute. But nature had other ideas."

Mt. St. Helens erupted with a searing blast that came down the mountain at 300 mph. One scientist speculated that "Truman had time maybe, to turn his head before Spirit Lake was buried by landslides and mud flows." (Mike Barber, Crotchety Harry Truman Remains an Icon for the Eruption, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, May 4, 2000)

The man in Jesus' story blew it. His grave marker noted two dates: the date of his birth and the date of his death. He lived his life as though that was all there was. He never gave thought to the "then what" question, and that was his fatal mistake.

The bible speaks of the hereafter or the "what then" as our hope. "And if we have hope in Christ only for this life, we are the most miserable people in the world." I Corinthians 15:19 NLT

If this is all there is we are the most miserable people in the world. If there is no resurrection from the dead, if there is no "then what" one version says that we are of all people, to be most pitied.

In 1969, Peggy Lee recorded Is That All There Is. It was and is a song that transcends time for all who are disillusioned with the events of life. The mournful lyric that remains in our minds is, "If that's all there is my friends, then let's keep dancing. Let's break out the booze and have a ball. If that's all there is." This is not all there is.

We have within us an innate sense of the eternal. “God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has placed eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the scope of God’s work from beginning to end.” Ecclesiastes 3:11 NLT Within the human beats a heart that hopes... God has placed in the human heart an awareness of the eternal.

When you were a small child you likely prayed, “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.” The prayer of a child acknowledges that we are more than flesh and blood and that this life is not all there is. The prayer reflects the notion that we are not only living bodies, we are living souls and that there is a hereafter.

When you came in today, you noticed that there are post-a-notes stuck all over the place. On each post-a-note is the letter “T” written with a “permanent” marker. Of course, the “permanent” marker is a contradiction to the not at all subtle reminder that everything in this life may be labeled temporary. The man in our story worked all his life to squirrel away the temporary.

The book of Ecclesiastes cites the sense of grief and loss that comes with the realization that we cannot take anything in this life with us into the next. He said, “I hated all the things I had worked for here on earth, because I must leave them to someone else who will live after me.” Ecclesiastes 2:18 NCV

His second mistake was that he lived like there would always be more time.

2. He lived like there would always be more time

It is costly procrastination to live like there is always more time. This is a costly procrastination!

I don’t know that the man Jesus spoke of was all that different from most of us. He was a take charge kind of guy who worked hard and planned well for his retirement... either the thought of “what then” never crossed his mind or simply put off dealing with the “what then” question. Either way, it is something he should have given some thought and preparation.

Perhaps he was even a bit presumptuous in assuming he was set forever. How many of us have underestimated what we might need or underestimated the effects a faltering economy? How many of us have invested heavily in our homes only to see that when the bottom falls out of the real estate market... so goes what we thought we had secured for retirement. How many of us have seen equity slip away in unstable mutual fund and stock market investments? How many of us have watched the yearly cost

of living go up as our fixed incomes remain the same? How many of us have simply put off getting serious about securing our earthly future and face retirement without the resources to do so? Preparing for retirement will just have to wait for another day.

Assuming that we have a lot of time to get ready for “what then” is presumptuous. James asks his readers, “How do you know what will happen tomorrow? For your life is like the morning fog – it’s here for a little while, then it’s gone.” James 4:14 NLT

In our story, Jesus said that God addressed the rich man who gave no thought to eternity saying, “You fool! You will die this very night.”

His third mistake was he gave no thought to the life to come.

3. He didn’t live this life in light of the life to come

It is a missed preparation when we don’t live life in light of the life to come. This is a missed preparation!

I mentioned earlier that God has placed eternity in the human heart. Innate within us is an awareness or inclination toward the after life. In Romans 1, the Apostle Paul wrote of the inexcusability of not facing the God issue in life. He wrote, “For the truth about God is known instinctively. God has put this knowledge in their hearts. From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth, sky, and all that God has made. They can clearly see God’s invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God.” Romans 1:19-20

How often do you suppose the man in Jesus’ story stood on a hillside overlooking his farm? How many times did he draw in a deep breath of spring air, look into a brilliant blue sky, feel the warmth of the sun, and marvel at the mystery of the seasons? The bible states that he saw enough to convince him of the reality of God in creation alone, to nudge him toward knowing God. And yet, Jesus said of this man, he was rich in earthly wealth, but he was spiritually poverty-stricken.... he did not know God.

Consequently, he gained it all here but lost it all there. “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.” I Corinthians 2:9NLT

The afterlife with God is described is unimaginable and inconceivable and eternal. What is to come is better than the mountain dream home, the ocean front cottage, the loftiest loft overlooking the most beautiful city in the world.

Do you remember the story about the rich Texan who wanted to be buried in his Cadillac? As his coffin laden Cadillac was lowered into the massive grave, one of the mourners was overheard to say, "Man, that's livin'." In truth, "livin'" will be seeing and hearing the inconceivable and unimaginable eternity God has prepared for us.

In another conversation with his disciples, Jesus asked, "And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose or forfeit your own soul in the process?" Luke 9:25 NLT

Jim Gray shared a little story with me this week about a couple from frigid Minneapolis, Minnesota who planned to spend their twentieth anniversary vacationing in Florida. Their schedules were impossible to coordinate so the husband flew down on Thursday, and his wife was to follow on Friday.

The husband checked into their hotel suite and was pleasantly surprised to see a computer with internet access in their room. So he emailed his wife. However, he inadvertently left out one letter of her e-mail address.

Meanwhile, a widow living in Houston, Texas, who was just returning home from her husband's funeral, checked her e-mail and found a message:

"Dearest Love: I have arrived! I know you are as surprised to hear from me as I was surprised that they have computers in our rooms. Everything has been prepared for your arrival tomorrow. I look forward to seeing you then. I hope your journey is as uneventful as was mine. P.S. It sure is hot down here!"

The bible says that, "It is destined that each person dies only once and after that comes judgment." Hebrews 9:27

We often make light of those things that like life and death and heaven and hell. Winston Churchill once said, "I am ready to meet my Maker, whether my Maker is prepared for the ordeal of meeting me is another question."

I'm sure Churchill said that with a twinkle in his eye... but make no mistake about it, God is prepared for us. The question is, are we prepared for God?

John 3:16 is one of the most familiar verses in the bible. You even see fans at professional football games draping John 3:16 banners over the stadium rails. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Who ever believes, receives eternal life.

"The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus." Romans 6:23

Earlier I quoted I John 5 which states, "This is what God has said: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son, Jesus Christ. So whoever has God's Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write this to you so that you who believe in the Son of God, may know that you have eternal life." I John 5:11-13

It is incomprehensible how anyone, no matter how busy he or she may be with the matters of this life, could pass from this life into the next without preparing for it... especially when embracing eternity is couched in words like "He gave" and "the gift of God is eternal life" and "He has given us eternal life."

Conclusion:

Ultimately, we embrace eternity by receiving the gift of God. Ultimately, we are wise if in living like we were dying, we embrace eternity.

I would like for you to imagine the imaginable. Bonnie has been driving a 1991 Chevy Corsica. It is worn out... it has 200 thousand miles on the odometer. It drinks oil and gasoline in equal parts. The tires are bald. It is covered with dings. The new has long worn off and the crusher is just around the corner.

Now, imagine with me the unimaginable. Bonnie's husband is rich. So one day I see Bonnie sitting at the stoplight. The Corsica is idling rough and dies. When it restarts blue smoke billows out like a cloud over the intersection and I say to myself, "I want more for Bonnie than that..."

So I drive out to that Mercedes-Benz dealership near 104th and Highway 36 and buy her a 2009 SL 600 Roadster. The interior is swathed in leather and hand polished burl walnut. The top is retractable. It has a 7-speed automatic transmission, a bi-turbo 5.5-liter V-12 engine that generates 510 horsepower and does 0 – 60 in 4.4 seconds.

Then I come home and park it in the driveway. I go into the house and invite Bonnie to the huge picture window in our living room and I show her the car. And then, I offer her the keys to her new 2009 SL 600 Mercedes Roadster. When does the Roadster become her Roadster? It becomes hers when she receives the key.

There is more to life than this life. There will not always be more time. There is a "then what" world to come. And we would do well to receive the key to the next life that God has extended to us for the taking. Will you receive the gift of eternal life through Christ today? Will you embrace eternity?